

# **The General Election in Thailand 2001: Will The Voters Continue to Buy What Thaksin Is Selling?**

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Leadership, vote-seeking, vote-choice, policy-seeking, and institutions are important topics of study in political science. This paper is part of a larger project examining all five variables. Here, I concern myself with the inter-related effects of two sets of games played by party leaders, including prime ministers, in their quest to lead governments and defend governments. I examine the leadership skills of Chuan Leekpai and Thaksin Shinawatra as party leaders and prime ministers as they relate to these games. Chuan has served as leader of the Democrats for thirteen years and was prime minister for almost six of those years, leading the two longest governments under democratic rule in Thai history. As a result, we have a great deal of empirical evidence about his leadership abilities and style. Thaksin is relatively new on the political scene and has been prime minister for almost two years. However, from what information we have it might be possible assess his long-term constraints as party leader and prime minister.

One set of games is what I term the “Political Operations” game. The Political Operations game consists of three sub-games: the “intra-party management” game; the inter-party management game; and, the electoral management game. The second set of games is what I term the Institutional Constraint game. The Institutional Constraint game also consists of three sub-games: the policy-seeking game; the portfolio-seeking game; and, the vote-seeking game.

The Political Operations games represent the day-to-day management of party (and government) affairs. In Thailand, as in the case of many other party systems, party factionalism dominates the intra-party game. This is particularly true of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s party, Thai Rak Thai (TRT). Thaksin has cabled together a political party consisting of former independent parties such as New Aspiration, political bosses (especially *Jao Phor* from the

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northeast), and political/business cronies. That significant factionalism should exist in the party should come as no surprise. But, the question arises as to Thaksin's ability to manage the factionalism.

All Thai democratic governments have been coalitions. The current government, initially, won an outright majority, saw that shrink to a plurality because of election violations, and resulted in an initial coalition government. However, because of a formal merger with the New Aspiration Party, a one-party majority government, the first in Thai history has been possible. But, Thaksin also has brought other parties into the government resulting in a super-majority. Thus, the inter-party management game has taken on a new structure, and dynamic, under the current government. For all practical purposes, the Democrat Party is the only opposition party. Thailand, for now, is a two-party plus system. Thaksin does not have to worry seriously about the inter-party game as part of a coalition government. He only must worry, and then not very much, about the Democrats who hold 127 seats in a 500 seat parliament. Nevertheless, such a majority government does have its own problems. In a coalition government, the opposition's targets are *all* the government parties, singly, in combination, and whole. As one link, or party, in the chain succumbs to opposition pressure, the government has the opportunity to replace it with a stronger link, or party. Currently, TRT is the *only* target of the Democrats.

Finally, one of the results of the changes created in the 1997 constitution came in the election system. While promulgated on the watch of the Chuan Leekpai (Democrat) government, the election reforms actually hurt the Democrats and helped the opposition, chiefly TRT. On first blush, it would appear the reforms will continue to help TRT more than the Democrats. However, using electoral institutions in order to gain advantage can be an uncertain game. Elections are, inherently, connected to a government's management of policies as well as its internal administration. Thus, vote-seeking is dependent not only on the management of electoral institutions but on the games of policy-seeking, portfolio-seeking, intra-party management, and inter-party management.

This paper argues that Chuan Leekpai (and the Democrats) were good-to-excellent managers of intra-party, and inter-party conflict. However, they were poor managers of electoral institutions (in particular, poor in the electoral institution design game that damaged their chances for re-election irreparably). In both the policy-seeking and portfolio-seeking games, Chuan Leekpai demonstrated little talent for using these games as instruments in seeking votes.

Given the lack of interest, and ability, in influencing the vote-seeking game, Chuan and the Democrats lost handily.

In contrast, Thaksin and TRT handled the vote-seeking game masterfully. As opposition, it generated vote-seeking policies, attracted able vote-seeking leaders, and managed its internal affairs quite well. However, seeking re-election as government is different from seeking election as opposition. Rather than being the hunter, Thaksin and TRT now are the hunted. Merely attacking the opposition is not good enough. The government must defend its policies and actions. These include its management of intra-party and inter-party affairs, as well as its policy-implementation and portfolio choices. I argue Thaksin's road to re-election is not as easy as it now appears due to recent mis-steps in various games and the capricious nature of the Thai electorate.

### **Scope of Paper**

The larger project, and this paper, are within an approach espoused by March and Olson (1989): rules, roles, and reasons. I seek to increase our understanding of the relationship between institutions and individuals. I argue institutions not only constrain individuals but also provide opportunities. This is true if “politicians are purposive actors who pursue their individual preferences or goals” (Searing:1991). Politicians work in institutional environments. These environments are constraining but do not remove all elements of individuality. As Searing (1991:1243) argues, “the best way to understand political institutions is to understand the interaction between such rules and reasons – between the constraints of institutional frameworks and the preferences of individual members.” Preferences and opportunities are constrained by institutions *and* actor's skills and interests. Actor's skills and interests help form objectives and strategies.

Leader and political party in Thailand often are confounded. Individuals create parties as a personal vehicle to satisfy their political ambitions. The institutionalization of Thai parties is incomplete, to some extent, because of their personalized character. The Democrats, as the longest surviving political party (since 1946) may be an aberration. Since Thaksin formed Thai Rak Thai as a personal vehicle for himself, the contrast between Chuan and Thaksin along this dimension should be useful. Leaders, inherently, are vote-seekers as individuals and party leaders. Skills in vote-seeking are important to effective leadership.

I include vote-choice because it is voters who, ultimately, decide which leaders are viable contenders for the prime ministership. However, I do so also because I am dissatisfied with the standard explanation for the *cause* of vote-choice in Thailand which I believe confuses our understanding of the relationship between politicians and voters in Thailand. One part of the standard explanation faults politicians and political parties for the way in which political parties and electoral behavior have evolved. In effect, this is a supply-side explanation. Politicians (and others) supply cash (and other things) to voters in exchange for votes.<sup>2</sup> The *demand* side of the equation receives little or no attention in such an approach. To the extent the demand-side is considered, it is within the spirit of reform or from the aggregate supply side (i.e., the political party). I suggest the explanation is not so simple. It is easy to argue Thais sell votes for money. The money though is hardly enough to represent a large incentive. Titinantana (1991) has suggested voters disapprove of candidates who use vote-buying exclusively as a vote-seeking technique. It also is unclear whether the money actually influences the vote-choice.

A second possibility is that the transaction cements local boss-voter relations. Anek (1996) suggests that while voters may accept money from all or most candidates, they end up voting for those candidates endorsed by the local boss. I suspect both are short-term considerations. Even in such circumstances, I argue Thai voters expect something from politicians relevant to what politicians are *supposed* to do. It may be “bringing home the pork” or working in the national interest. Is it not possible to claim that while voters may expect short-term cash gains, they *also* expect longer-term *policy* benefits. To the extent voters balance short-term and long-term considerations in their vote choice, they are strategic voters.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, little study of vote-choice in Thailand is available. In particular, the Thai as a strategic voter receives no attention. The Thai vote-choice literature aggregates the question at levels far above that of the voter. This paper takes a different tack. Cox (1997) has defined strategic voting in a majoritarian election “voting for a lower-ranked candidate that one believes is stronger, rather than for a higher-ranked candidate that one believes is weaker.” Underlying this simple definition is the assumption that voters vote with some personal utility in mind. They

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<sup>2</sup> The paper, only briefly, touches upon the problem of vote-buying as a symptom of corruption in the entire political system. For a treatment of corruption, specifically the corruption of “crony capitalism,” as a more general systemic problem in Asia see Kang (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Albritton and Srisumpob (1992) argue there is utility for the voter who accepts payment for his vote and that there is evidence a demand side to vote-buying exists.

will vote for a candidate or party who advocates policies that converge on the voter's own preferences. Thus, a vote-selling voter is not a strategic voter. In only a limited sense is a voter who votes as the local boss dictates a strategic voter. This paper assumes a higher degree of cognitive and evaluative abilities on the part of Thai voters.

First, the 2001 election demonstrated a degree of "hindsight" voting as well as "foresight" voting. That is, two explanations for the election result were: votes *against* Chuan and the Democrats; or votes *for* Thaksin and TRT. By voting against Chuan and the Democrats (and other government parties), voters exercised hindsight voting strategy that punished the incumbent parties. By voting for Thaksin and TRT, voters utilized foresight voting in their willingness to give them a chance to govern and to influence that governing process.<sup>4</sup>

Voters evaluate and constantly re-evaluate politicians. As a result, there is a relationship between the vote-choice and the leadership skills of politicians (see Appendix 1). This relationship is especially important when examining the links between vote-seeking and vote-choice. Voter and politician operate within an electoral framework; each attempt to "match" the other. They do so with multiple institutional environments influencing this movement toward or away from each other. As the voter attempts to control politicians who seek re-election and influence politicians who seek election, politicians attempt to influence the voter. One important link between the two is the institutional framework.

Tsebelis 1990) has noted the importance of nested games. In particular, he divides games into multiple arena games and institutional design games. This paper more closely lays out the multiple arena games according to the institutions (rules of the game<sup>5</sup>) governing those arenas. Thus, the games for which prime ministers (and contending leaders) are most responsible are: electoral, government formation, government maintenance, and government dissolution. Within each of these arenas are two other games: intra-party and inter-party. The institutional design

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1. <sup>4</sup> For a complete examination of the problems involved in hindsight and foresight voting see Powell (2000). As Powell argues, hindsight voting allows citizens to *control* politicians while foresight voting allows the citizen to *influence* his or her MP.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I accept North's (1990) definition: "institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic. Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve through time and hence is the key to understanding historical change." I go further than North, however, and argue institutions also are "humanly devised" *opportunities* "that shape human interaction." It is the tension between constraint and opportunity (Williamson:1996) defines opportunism as "self-interest seeking with guile) that drives the evolutionary character of social behavior. Thus institutional constraints and institutional opportunities drive the evolution of political systems.

game concerns *all* these games and arenas. Likewise, the policy game is ubiquitous. However, the vote-seeking game, while not entirely absent, is relatively dormant during the government formation game. As a possible election looms, the vote-seeking game assumes greater importance during the government maintenance game.

Leaders face constraints from the institutional environment. This is the structural environment. However, because leaders also have opportunities, or space, to operate within that structural environment, the personal style of prime ministers introduces an element of agency. Leaders find themselves bounded by the constraints of institutions but within those constraints are opportunities to improve one's position and even alter the institutional environment. Losers may find opportunities within a set of institutions intended, specifically, to constrain them. Winners may find themselves constrained by the very institutions created to hinder the opposition.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, a leader's skills in different institutional environments become critical to his personal success as well as the success of his party or organization.

Tsebelis (1990:8-9) argues that as observers we sometimes see political actors take *apparently* sub-optimal actions. They are apparently sub-optimal because the actor must take into account the effect actions in one game will have on another game. Often the observer will not see the connection between games. Muller and Strom (1999) approach the problem more empirically by discussing the *trade-offs* political actors (especially political parties and their leaders) must make between the vote-seeking (electoral) game and the policy (although policy permeates all the games described here, I focus on policy within the government maintenance phase and its effect on the vote-seeking phase) game. Trade-offs are inherent in politics. But, I argue the specific trade-offs made are, in part, the result of the leader's strategies, objectives, and attitudes toward vote-seeking and policy-seeking. Decisions made during one institutional environment are critical for decision-making in downstream environments.

This paper argues voters are interested in electoral and policy outcomes. However, Chuan was not an able vote-seeking leader and he was not effective in the policy outcomes arena which is really the Lasswellian (1936) question of "who gets what, when, how?" He was a management/administrative leader adept at forming and maintaining governments and implementing a particular policy vision. That is, the trade-off he made was to emphasize a processual policy-seeking rather than outcomes policy-seeking and vote-seeking. On the other

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Moe (1990).

hand, Thaksin has demonstrated ability as a vote-seeking leader. The question is whether he can demonstrate the leadership abilities required to maintain his party, his government, and his voter support base.

As Panebianco (1988) argues in the general case of organizations, the objective of forming an organization is different from the objective of maintaining the entity. Similarly, I argue the objective of winning an election is different from the objective of forming a government and maintaining that government. Indeed, the objective of winning an election to form a new government is different from winning *re*-election as a government. Not only are the institutional environments different, in the latter the relationship of the leader (and party) to the voter has changed. Defending a government or candidacy is different from attacking the incumbent. Vote-seeking in the role as government is different from vote-seeking in the role as opposition.<sup>7</sup>

### **Leadership Strategies**

The leadership strategy of most concern in this paper is one directed at increasing public support. In order to become prime minister or remain prime minister, leaders need the support of the public. Standard explanations place political party leaders, especially parliamentary leaders, at a rather low level on the explanatory scale. The standard explanation, especially in list systems, is that individuals vote on the basis of party. However, researchers have found that such leaders have become an “increasingly influential electoral force” (Bean and Mughan:1989). Bean and Mughan tested the hypothesis that the appeal of political party leaders is a “function of the leadership qualities voters perceive individual candidates as possessing” (1989:1165). Bean and Mughan focused their work on Britain and Australia. But might not the argument hold in a country such as Thailand where powerful leaders are desired?

This paper builds upon this hypothesis and finds Chuan wanting in the Thai case. While leading the Democrats to a narrow two-seat victory in 1992, Chuan proceeded to lose three consecutive elections as Democrat leader. He has shown little ability in attracting and maintaining public support. Thaksin has amply demonstrated this skill in terms of an initial

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<sup>7</sup> Of possible interest would be the effect of democratic institutions on the political behaviors of Chuan and Thaksin. Divisions characterize the literature on the general issue of institutional effect. However, it is interesting to note that Chuan has spent much of his political life in environments where democracy has suffered severe discontinuities. Thaksin’s political life is less than ten years old and has occurred in strictly a democratic environment. Perhaps Chuan’s apparent disinterest in vote-seeking can be attributed, in part, to this.

election run. However, the dynamic of maintaining a voter base and attracting new voters is different as prime minister. The question is whether Thaksin can continue to count on the support of the public. While not making a final judgment on this, I will argue that Thaksin's overwhelming electoral victory in 2001 and subsequent overwhelming advantage in parliament may be misleading as to his prospects for re-election.

In the case of Thailand, one of Darling's (1978) laws is useful.

...the Thai political system abhors a vacuum at the highest level. Powerful political factions or groups have often attempted to rule through a respectable 'front man' in the top position of Prime Minister, but in time this endeavor inevitably fails and the leaders of the dominant political faction assume the highest government posts. Unless this is done the struggle for power among contending factions continues and political stability intensifies.

Darling uses this "law" to explain much of pre-democratic Thailand's political behavior amongst elites. However, I would argue that it meshes with Hanks' "merit and power" argument (Hanks:1962) and resonates today. Even in democratic governments, Thai voters look for powerful individuals to lead them. This, at least, offers a general explanation for the link between voter and candidate/leader. But, voters may perceive merit and power differently. That is, even amongst Thais there may be different perceptions.<sup>8</sup>

Being powerful and being *perceived* as powerful are two different concepts. This paper argues Chuan, as prime minister, was powerful. But, voters and the media *perceived* him as a lackey for international capital and, therefore, weak. Chuan pursued policies that cemented this view. Thus, the policies were narrowly conceived within the policy-seeking environment and were not instrumentally useful as vote-seeking instruments.

At the same time, Thaksin as party leader purposely developed policies that appealed to voters, especially rural voters and voters in the north and northeast. Recently, Thaksin has begun to construct policies, particularly regarding rubber, that are intended to dent the Democrats' base in the south. However, being the leader of a political party in opposition is different from being the leader of a political party in government, especially as prime minister. As the head of government, Thaksin will have to *defend* his policies and political choices at the next election. In this sense, his options narrow when seeking *re*-election compared to seeking election. Will

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<sup>8</sup> Regional cleavages between north, northeast, south, and central account for some of these differences. The urban-rural-suburban cleavage also is noticeable. Still other cleavages may cross-cut these.



Thaksin demonstrate the necessary vote-seeking leadership qualities required as prime minister as he did when in the role of opposition leader?

### **Chuan as Prime Minister**

This paper argues Chuan has been more interested in policy-seeking, and a specific kind of policy-seeking, than in vote-seeking. I further argue Chuan has, mostly, ignored the “who gets what, when, how” questions of politics. The Chuan-led government of 1992-95 had four basic policy themes:

1. the placement of technocrats in office;
2. a continuation of the Anand economic policies;
3. minimizing military intervention by strengthening parliament;
4. economic reform and stability, particularly increasing the efficiency of reform and the policy process at the expense of policy outcomes..

Chuan also faced several political problems that he successfully managed. These included:

1. within the coalition, NAP and Palang Dharma split over the potential revision of laws related to Islam;
2. the Democrats and NAP vetoed Palang Dharma’s proposals for the reform of provincial administration;
3. the opposition used the budget debate as an attempt to split off NAP and Social Action from the coalition;
4. the opposition used debates on the proposed new constitution to topple the government.

The party seemed to be lost and incapable of generating strategies and tactics to retain and expand its vote base when leading a government. Although any prime minister is faced with constraints, in “how far and fast he or she can lead,” “Chuan’s instinct would appear to be to play it safe” (Overholt:1999:1022).

## **Chuan's Leadership:**

### *Criticisms of the Chuan Style of Government, 1992 – 1995*

Chuan's "style" of governing was, arguably, his major problem. The criticisms can be summarized thusly:

1. "hands-off," indecisive, and without clear direction (Kusuma:1994:48);
2. non-charismatic (*FEER*:3/23/95);
3. "plodding style" (*FEER*, 3/23/95);
4. an inability to "dramatize issues" (Suchit:1993);
5. unwillingness to connect with people (see Klima's description of the Chuan government's response to victims of "Bloody May" – 2002:162-163).

### *Criticisms of the Chuan Government, 1997-2000*

Many of the same refrains heard throughout the first government were reiterated during the second.

1. Case (2001) criticizes the first Chuan government for bringing in provincial businessmen who compromised the "clean" image of the Democrats and Chuan himself.<sup>9</sup> Haggard (2000:99) makes clear the argument when he states, "the basic problem, as always in Thailand's fragmented party system, was that to bring Chart Pattana into the coalition not only meant compromises with politicians of less than sterling reputation, but granting them portfolios as well." Case (2001:532) then argues this arrangement allowed the CPP to "use(d) its ministerial posts and seats in the Senate to ward off reform measures that impinged on its leaders' business dealings.
2. A *Bangkok Post* editorial (November 2, 2000) put it, the Democrats only in late October put forth an agricultural program, albeit it one that was a "welcome package left woefully late." The editorial continued, "past prodding of the Chuan administration has had virtually no impact."

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<sup>9</sup> I suspect a compelling story is here for some social scientist caring to examine the inter-party relations between the Democrats and CPP in the 1990s. A game theory accounting might be especially interesting.

3. In terms of policy, the campaign between the Democrats and TRT came down to what Case (2001:538) has called “the Democrat’s dull commitments to austerity” versus a “Thai Rak Thai platform [that] shimmered with populism.
4. A headline in the November 9, 2000 *Bangkok Post* succinctly described Chuan’s electoral problem: “a leader in reform, or an undisciplined lackey of the World Bank?”
5. As early as 1998, the government was accused of “slow progress on the political reform front” (Suchitra:1999:84).
6. Pasuk and Baker (2001) argue businessmen felt wronged by the Democrats, domestic capital felt “abandoned”, and generally that the IMF and international capital had taken over the country.
7. Bidhya (2000) chimes in when he discusses the fact that Thai citizens have been unable to connect to government reform initiatives, especially those proposed by the Chuan government. The reasons are fourfold:
  - a. reformers support the belief that a global reform paradigm with ready-made reform packages exists which can be easily transplanted in the Thai public sector;
  - b. reformers prefer to define success largely as reform output rather than reform outcomes or long-term reform consequences;
  - c. reformers have overemphasized the efficiency aspects of the new public management at the expense of other government goals;
  - d. reform in Thailand has been portrayed as a managerial problem instead of a political one.
8. As Bidhya (2000:402) notes, “in reform commission meetings there is not much discussion...about ‘who gains and who loses’ from a particular reform proposal. Rather, the discussions are about the ‘how-to’ of management reform.”
9. Overholt (1999:1014) states, “although they followed the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) programs and dealt with their failed finance companies and collapsed foreign exchange reserves, the Thais basically declared a time-out at the end of 1997 and focused on writing a new constitution.” Reform, and specifically “how-to” reform moved ahead of the economic issues of “who gets what, when, and how.

10. In 1997, the Assembly of the Poor had conducted a 99-day demonstration to elicit concessions from the Chavalit government. As Baker (2000) notes, the Assembly of the Poor represents the most disenfranchised and poorest-of-the-poor sector of the peasantry. However, the second Chuan government “deliberately set out to erase the political space secured by the Assembly” (Baker:2000:24). The Chuan government took back every one of the concessions granted by the Chavalit government.

The events cited above demonstrate consistency in the Chuan style of governing. They are symptomatic of both Chuan governments and the Democrats as a party: an inability to connect with, sympathize with, and commiserate with rural citizens, but especially the newly powerful rural. Certainly, no empathy is present. Writers for *Krungthep Thurakit* and *Matichon* analyzed the 2001 election as one where the Democrats failed to address the concerns of the people and lost accordingly.

### **Thaksin and Thai Rak Thai**

In many ways, Thaksin’s ascent is the apex of what McCargo (2001a:90) describes as a Thai form of politics that has become “highly commercialized and exclusionary.” In one sense, Thaksin took the traditional route to his goal of becoming prime minister: he formed his own party, Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai). Pasuk and Baker (2000:153) have posited that Thaksin “offered a mix of the new politics and the old. On the one hand, TRT was launching towards the 2000 [sic] elections with a party programme – of support for small business and peasants – which offered a very different alternative to the globalized direction of the Democrats.” At the same time, TRT “appeared to be the new successor in a line of ‘Messiah parties’—like Chamlongs Palang Tham and Chavalit’s NAP. Such parties have leaders who promise to save the country, but no depth of talent. They end up attracting a motley following, and decay from the inside.”

While the details of the party program offered for the January 2001 election may have been new and Thaksin may even have meant the program to be an actual set of policies offered the voters, it is unclear whether the rest of the party and the electorate itself took the proffered policies seriously. Were they serious policies meant to stand on their own or mere instruments in an effort to attract votes? Even if the latter, it might be argued this was an improvement over the

old pure vote-buying strategies. However, it may also be argued that the policies merely represented a new, more sophisticated, and nationally-oriented form of vote-buying. As Pasuk and Baker (2000:152) describe the program, it was intended to “direct[ly] appeal to the feeling of neglect, sublimed nationalism, and entrepreneurial pride of Thai business.” There was even the hint of “magic” in Thaksin’s declaring, “if I’m the government, I will open up choices for people who have the leaning and the ability to be entrepreneurs. People who earn salaries now will have the opportunity to quit and become entrepreneurs without facing excess risk.” It had the feel of a “get-rich-quick” scheme. Rather than, “I feel your pain,” Thaksin seemed to offer that he could eliminate the “pain.” If the electorate accepted this program as part of the Thai-way of politics, that is one thing; but, if the Thai electorate took Thaksin at his word, that is another. If the Thai electorate expects Thaksin to deliver on that program, he must deliver if he wants a second term. This is the strategic voter exercising hindsight at work.

In the provinces, Thaksin used old-style Thai politics by bringing in loose factions, generating ad hoc alliances with *jao phor*, and old-fashioned vote-buying (although the latter was left to individual politics and factions). In the Bangkok area, he bet voters would follow their usual tendency to “veer between wild enthusiasm for the Democrats and total rejection of them” (Pasuk and Baker:2000:152). As Bangkok had veered toward the Democrats in the past two elections, he thought they would totally reject them this time around. In the end, Thaksin and TRT had the benefit of the “bandwagon effect” (Brams and Garriga-Pico:1973) as politicians “jumped” to the party and voters made their vote decisions.<sup>10</sup>

Chuan and the Democrats were concerned with reform for the efficiency of reform; is Thaksin only interested in politics because of his concern with increasing his own, and his cronies’, wealth? After all, as Ukrist (2001a:30) continues, “...the ‘new money’ turned out to be remarkably similar to the ‘old money.’ Once established, the new entrepreneurs were quick to develop political links and to use these links to protect and expand their own business interests.” In fact, as a tactic in securing the political primacy of “new money,” Thaksin entered into coalitions with the representatives of “old money.” Nelson (2001) notes the development of TRT was suspiciously like that of Samakkhi Tham in 1991. That is, a party formed strictly to

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<sup>10</sup> As this paper unfolds, it should become clear that the “bandwagon effect” may operate in reverse. That is, as voters abandon the party, faction leaders and local bosses may do so as well. It is likely the reverse effect, faction leaders and local bosses leaving the party leading to loss of voter support, may also operate but in lesser magnitude.

elect a prime minister. *Matichon* (01/24/01) commented the mere suggestion of “buying” an election as premier cast condescending aspersions against the Thai people. Of course, American political candidates “buy” elections, and money politics is considered a bane of Japanese democracy. There really are two questions here: one is whether money, outright, “buys” votes either explicitly (vote-buying) or implicitly (a candidate’s wealth allows him or her to outspend the opposition); and the second is the “selling” of one’s party or candidate as a marketing device, like soap or toothpaste. In democracies (even older, advanced democracies), the “purchase” of office may be accomplished in numerous ways.

### **The 2001 General Election**

The January 2001 general election had two new salient features: a new electoral system, courtesy of the 1997 constitution; and, Thai Rak Thai as a political force. Although not concerned with the electoral system, *per se*, it deserves a brief comment as to effect upon party strategies in the election. Not only was the House increased in size to 500, but the way the 500 MPs were to be chosen was altered. Now, 400 are elected from single-member districts (previously, all had been elected from multi-member districts) and 100 are chosen from party lists.

It also is true that while proponents and designers of reform, the Democrats had little understanding of the possible outcomes of reform, especially electoral reform. Referencing Lijphart’s (1992) thought that the choice of electoral system is extremely important in democracies, especially new democracies, Kaminski (2002:350) argues, “electoral reforms often generated important and unanticipated political consequences and *often hurt the designers.*” [Emphasis added]

As for the election itself, besides not being skillful vote-seekers (one can argue *because* of it), Chuan and the Democrats had boxed themselves into a corner. Chuan desired to set a record as the longest-serving democratic prime minister, as he had done in his first term. However, this goal came into conflict with the need to call for elections at the most propitious time for the Democrats. As Lupia and Strom (1995) argue, “decisions to terminate coalitions for new elections result from leaders’ rational responses to the constraints of legislative and electoral institutions and the anticipated feelings of the electorate.” But, Chuan never demonstrated

sensitivity to the “feelings of the electorate.” As they further note, the closer a government is to the end of its term, election-related opportunity costs are at a minimum at the end of a government’s term. By April of 2000, TRT had overtaken the Democrats in the public opinion polls (*Bangkok Post*, April 23). From that moment on, Thai Rak Thai never looked back and Chuan never had an opportunity again to time the House election at a moment favorable to the Democrats. As the election drew nearer, Chuan concerned himself with the usual problem of party jumping (*Bangkok Post*, 11/10/00). But, this time it was Democrats jumping ship. On the day the story appeared, Chuan gave a pep talk to party members described as a “don’t give up even before fight starts” talk (*Bangkok Post*, 11/11/00). Indeed, by the time the party proposed its party list candidates, “opposition” types who could give Thaksin and TRT a hard time in parliament received favorable places. A reverse bandwagon was taking place amongst the Democrats.

The table in Appendix 2 provides a trend line of popular support between Chuan and Thaksin in the 35 months prior to the election. One, of course, first notes the precipitous decline of Chuan, from 73 percent approval in February 1998 to just under 25 percent by election time. However, as this is a paper concerned not merely with the Chuan versus Thaksin story, but with the Thaksin premiership, the other notable trend is Thaksin’s own decline from May 2001 to December 2001.<sup>11</sup> Note that Chuan’s popularity high of 73 percent was reached within four months of assuming office. Thaksin’s current popularity high, also of almost 73 percent also was reached within four months of assuming office. A case can be made that both figures are “honeymoon” approval ratings, but the precipitous declines (although not as great in Thaksin’s case) remain interesting. It is unfortunate that we cannot be sure if Thaksin’s ratings have dropped any further.

Had Thai Rak Thai and Thaksin not appeared, it is possible the Democrats could have muddled through to an election victory. The availability of a powerful alternative in Thaksin and

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<sup>11</sup> Having not seen the actual questions used in the ABAC POLL surveys, I cannot testify as to their reliability or validity. Rather than emphasizing any individual number, I invite the reader to examine the trends. The second notable feature is the lack of data after December 2001. In February 2002, the Thaksin government reacted negatively to the release of the December 2001 poll by invading the offices of ABAC POLL at Assumption University and examining individual survey results. In the aftermath, the Interior Ministry told officials at Assumption and all other survey organizations in Thailand that they should consider the effect the results of their polls will have on national unity. In addition, the ministry offered guidelines as to the way polls should be conducted.

TRT was helpful to the voter. Even then, Chuan may have had difficulties winning under the old electoral system and without TRT. His lack of vote-seeking skills may have ensured this result.

Thaksin shrewdly developed a party program that appealed to the masses. I argue it is possible to identify the nascent development of change within the Thai electorate. This change can be seen along, at least, two dimensions: increasing political strength by rural voters, along with an increasingly important suburban political environment (Albritton and Thomas-2000). As Case (2001:537) notes, Thaksin's program was "fiscally dubious," but it had the advantage of attracting voters. Case goes on to say, Thaksin adopted the prototypical populist stance:

the presence of a charismatic leader who forges a cross-class coalition that links elements of sullen big business, insecure small proprietors, and alienated mass audiences and then binds them together in a wounded nationalist pride. In addition, the leader usually promises quick statist solutions for failing markets, offering government funding for industrialists who cooperate and redistributive schemes for the dispossessed.

Thaksin has assumed the premiership as a "can do" administrator. Like Chuan, he has set his sights on the goal of serving a complete term of government. It is unclear whether this objective also will serve as a set of vote-seeking blinders to his administration. Thaksin already has expressed interest in serving not merely a second full-term, but four full terms. As Ukrist (2001b:70) has pointed out, Thaksin is interested in protecting his telecommunications empire. Moreover, Ukrist argues Thaksin may be as interested in creating a political monopoly as he has been in creating a telecommunications monopoly. In effect, Ukrist argues, TRT is "the political party of a gigantic telecommunications capital group." Generally, Chang Nol (*The Nation*, September 3, 2001) has termed the Thaksin government "billionairist."

Chuan managed intra party factionalism quite well. Thaksin is demonstrating a lack of skill in this regard. The recent cabinet shake-up generated consternation amongst some elements of TRT. A headline in the October 4, 2002 edition of the *Bangkok Post* read, "New line-up draws flak from within ruling party." Important members of the party felt Thaksin had put "political interests...above the country's well-being." A second article in the same edition stated, "underachievers or scandal-tainted ministers who count for the prime minister in terms of political and financial contributions remain in the Cabinet..." Thaksin's strength notwithstanding, Chambers (2002) has described ways in which factions remain relevant and a potential roadblock to government duration.



Indeed, bringing in New Aspiration and Chart Thai may exacerbate Thaksin's intra-party problems. The current negotiations between TRT and Chat Pattana to merge sometime in the next year is another sign that Thaksin seeks to dominate the national political scene at the expense of intra-party and inter-party cohesion. TRT deputy secretary-general Ekkapap Pholsue has stated, "the pending party merger is in the country's interest and will not cause a rift with the other coalition partner, the Chat Thai Party, which is also wooing the CPP" (*The Nation*, 1/9/03) This remains to be seen as bigger does not necessarily mean better.

### **Corruption and the Thaksin Government**

A series of scandals also has rocked the Thaksin government and these have placed further emphasis upon the factional divisions within the party. The first major scandal involved "the sale of stockpiled rubber to Singapore-based companies with political connections." (*The Nation*, 11/11/02). While some bureaucrats have been punished, no politicians have been fingered. Indeed, *The Nation* opined that "politicians behind the questionable rubber deals may escape punishment."

The latest scandal involving TRT members concerns the purchase of 130,000 tons of compost. Former Agriculture minister Chucheeep Hansawad and Withaya Thienthong, secretary both to Chucheeep and the current Agriculture minister Sora-at Klinprathum, have been identified as the responsible parties. Further embarrassing to the government was the fact that the Democrats unearthed the scandal.

Given that the Thaksin government has been called "the most image conscious" in Thai history, it is especially ironic that a survey had been taken of farmers in stricken provinces. The survey revealed the farmers did not want the government to supply them with compost, "even if the organic fertilizer had been genuine." (*The Nation*, 11/11/02) Thaksin had run his election campaign by listening to surveys taken of voters. His government, apparently, does not listen as well as his campaign organization.

Unfortunately, for Thaksin, the scandal involves members of the powerful Wang Nam Yen faction within TRT. As Appendix 3 demonstrates, voters have placed control of corruption high on their list of expectations for the Thaksin government. However, barely one-fifth of the respondents felt the government had accomplished anything of substance on this front. As *The*

*Nation* (11/11/02) opined, “on the one hand, public opinion is building support for any drastic action that the prime minister may consider taking to get to the bottom of the matter and bring to justice any politicians found to have been involved. On the other hand, any move against members of the Wang Nam Yen faction could entail serious internal conflict.” While the Democrat’s unearthed the scandal, Charoen Chankomol, a TRT MP and member of the rival Wang Bua Ban faction, is credited with publicizing the event. Wang Bua Ban is led by Thaksin’s sister, Yaowapa Wongsawat. Thus, intra-party factionalism and voter discontent both are increasing and represent potential threats to Thaksin’s government.

### **Threats to Thaksin’s Government**

Appendix 2 demonstrates a decline in Thaksin’s popularity through December 2001. The scandals have done nothing to improve his image amongst the people. Given the prime minister’s perceived weak handling of the most recent affair, the *Bangkok Post* stated, “the prime minister is seeing his once popular image as go-getter and decisive policy-maker slowly lose its shine.” (11/15/02). At least one Thai commentator predicted Thaksin will have to bend rather than break with Wang Nam Yen. “He would be compelled to compromise to avoid causing political disequilibrium within his party.” (*BP*, 11/15/02) Former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun stated “corruption was running rampant under its [the government’s] nose and it was digging its own grave by not driving it into oblivion.”

A similar scenario operating under a different dynamic is the possibility that local bosses could desert Thaksin and TRT. Finally, there is the possibility of voter desertion. In fact, there does not even have to be the reality of voter desertion. If some TRT factions and/or local bosses *perceive* the voters deserting TRT, they may do so as well. Conversely, if voters *perceive* factionalism as a debilitating factor in Thaksin’s ability to govern and view it as a problem Thaksin cannot solve, they may desert him. Elected as a powerful leader, he must demonstrate he *is* a powerful leader. As Narong has stated in a *Bangkok Post* column (2/16/01), Thaksin’s strength “will pale in significance if Mr. Thaksin cannot lead his faction-prone party.” Chambers (2002) has identified eleven factions in TRT and demonstrated that factionalism remains a major source of concern for the new party. Thaksin must get things done and not make excuses or blame others.

The 2001 General Election seemed to involve both the “hindsight” voter (who voted against the Democrats) and the foresighted voter. Chuan was punished by the hindsighted voter and Thaksin was the recipient (mostly) of this vote as well as the foresighted voter. As Chang Noi in *The Nation* (February 18, 2002) wrote, “...Thaksin persuaded the poor to elect a government of the rich. This could never have happened without the crisis and without the Democrats.” The question is whether Thaksin can avoid punishment by the voters in the next election. Much will depend on his ability to connect the governing of his administration with voter interests.

Thus, the results shown in Appendix 3 are interesting. By voters’ estimations, Thaksin has achieved significant success. At the same time, there are issue areas where voters feel he has not yet accomplished what the voters thought he meant to accomplish according to his campaign promises. A striking example is the case of corruption where 67.8 of the respondents expected Thaksin to do something about the problem yet only 23.5 percent view him as actually having done something. Corruption is an institutional problem in Thailand. Again, while the empirical evidence in Thailand is slim, evidence from other countries indicates that the higher the level of corruption the lower the level of support for the political system (Anderson and Tverdova:2000). Specifically, they find “corruption has a more negative effect on system support among those in the minority than those in the majority.” That negative effect is directed toward politicians and the political system. As prime minister, and a prime minister who has promised to do something about corruption, Thai citizens will hold him accountable. Again, I do not wish to belabor any specific number of voters who allow specific issues, or issues in general, to influence their vote-choice, but *do* wish to emphasize that Thai voters, evidently, *are* issue-oriented along some dimensions. To the extent these issue dimensions are salient to vote-choice, Thaksin may face problems in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The problem faced by Chuan and the Democrats as they squared off against Thai Rak Thai in January 2001 was that they had not put a good face on their accomplishments. Thai voters expect their leaders to be powerful, larger-than-life figures. Chuan played the intra-party and inter-party games almost to perfection in both governments. However, management of the electoral game was either ignored or was inept.

On one hand, the election of Thaksin has changed much of the Thai political landscape. On the other, the methods used to gain victory look suspiciously like “old goods wrapped up in new clothes.” Does Thaksin actually believe in his own policies outside of using them as vote-seeking schemes? If Thaksin does not believe in his own policies and uses them strictly to attract votes, while voters are not serious about cleaning up government and the political environment, nothing much will fundamentally change in Thailand.

With only 127 seats in a 500-seat parliament, the Democrats are not a major problem for TRT. But, Democrats, for all practical purposes, *are* the opposition. The Democrats must learn to compete in this new environment. They have done so in the past; can they do it again? For example, the June 2002 Bangkok elections showed the Democrats holding on to their Bangkok base by winning 28 seats to TRT’s 25. TRT had hoped to win as many as 40 seats (*The Nation*, June 17, 2002). Also, while the Democrats had no hope of emerging victorious from the May censure debate, some damage to TRT’s image was inflicted by the party. The May censure debate indicates they can effectively jab the government but the party is far from being able to deliver a knockout punch. With Chuan as leader, it is unlikely to deliver such a punch. Already the succession lines are forming within the Democrat party. New blood is being prepared in the old party. However, in recent days, Democrat leaders have had to issue statements re-iterating that Chuan will step down (*BP* and *The Nation*, 1/9/03). Rumors that Chuan might stay on as party leader cannot help the party amongst voters.

At the same time, can Thaksin survive? For the moment, the answer is undoubtedly yes. But, can Thaksin deliver on all his promises? If not, what will be the result? If he changes his promises, his premiership may look like an administration run “on-the-fly.” If he continues to blame others, including the media, he may look like a politician not fully in control of his administration. *The Nation* (March 2002) already has referred to “Thaksingate” as the Anti-Money Laundering Office began an investigation of senior journalists critical of the government. If he cannot deliver on his promises, even with such a large majority, and continues blaming others for his problems, the voters, especially the poor who believed in his “populist” message may turn on him. 1973 student leader Thirayuth Boonmi, who now is an academic, recently issued a blunt critique of the Thaksin government. Once again, Thaksin reacted personally and virulently. *The Nation* (January 9, 2003) reacted to Thaksin’s reaction with this repost:

One of the surest signs of a sophisticated leadership in a democratic society is the ability of political leaders to take criticism without losing their cool. It would be better still if they are able to articulate ideas and participate actively in the public discourse in a rational way. By taking it personally and lashing out against each and every critic, the prime minister may be exposing his perceived character – egocentric and narrow-minded – as exactly what it is that makes many people so critical.

It is interesting to note that when Thirayuth criticized Chuan Leekpai for being “stubborn,” “inflexible,” and exhibiting a “failure to listen to critics,” Thaksin “thanked” him for the criticism. Thaksin did not “thank” Thirayuth for the similar criticism leveled at himself. Thirayuth has coined the term, “Thaksinisation” referring to Thaksin’s tendency to “monopolistic power” (*The Nation*, 1/9/03).

Regarding Thaksin’s actual policies, Chang Nol wrote, “...how do the interests of the rich and the poor fit together? How does Thaksin fit the Pluto on the populism?” Will Thaksin become an apologist for his own administration? In the recent city election, the fact that the Democrats continued to do well in Bangkok while TRT fell far short of its hopes, demonstrates TRT has yet to fully dominate the national political scene. This paper argues Thaksin, as a businessman, has been successful in the telecommunications/business institutional framework. Can he adjust to the institutions of governing in order to be equally successful?

Already he is in danger of losing support amongst the poor. In July activists from several NGOs demonstrated in front of Government House. This rally seems to have signaled an end to the closeness between *Khon Duen Tula* (People of October) and Thaksin (*The Nation*, July 30, 2002). The same article pointed out that Thaksin has lost some support amongst the poor. Difficult budget times also are placing constraints on Thaksin (*The Nation*, June 25, 2002). The government’s plans to increase the size of the bureaucracy from 15 ministries to 20 and an additional 61 bureaus places even more pressure on the budget (*Bangkok Post*, February 12, 2002). Furthermore, if Hewison (2002) is correct and localism is on the upsurge both governmentally and politically, where does this leave Thaksin? An assistant to village headman Daeng Kam-nuek noted the “central government’s good intentions might backfire if not handled properly” (*The Nation*, January 3, 2002).

Chuan and the Democrats failed to understand the developing strength of civil society in Thailand.<sup>12</sup> This is the case even though the reforms they supported were the result of the 1997 constitution that was to strengthen civil society. A civil society strengthened by a constitution and reforms, are now seeing them watered down or even eliminated by the Thaksin government. As Ukrist (2001b:38) claims, “the TRT’s victory represents a betrayal of civil society’s ability to achieve political reforms: the TRT has become both the symbol and victim of the previous decade of change.”

Thaksin’s potential voter problems revolve around four leadership issues:

1. voters utilizing a strategy of hindsight to punish Thaksin and TRT for not fulfilling their promises;
2. the possibility that Thaksin cannot reconcile the convergences with the divergences of urban, suburban, and rural political cultures;
3. the inability to manage intra-party disputes;
4. the inability to control exits from TRT, thus leading to a bandwagon effect that would infect not only the legislative party but its voter support base.

All four issues relate to the leadership strategies of centralization of power, involvement of outside groups, and increasing public support. The four potential problems also relate to different institutions and institutional environments. Institutions represent constraints and different institutional environments present different constraining features. Can Thaksin adjust? Can Thaksin find opportunity where others might see constraint?

Merely consolidating the party system will not solve factional rifts. Merely balancing portfolios amongst factions will not solve factional differences. As Andre Agassi learned in tennis, style is *not* more important than substance.

Thai politics is undergoing a great sea-of-change. Thai politics no longer is dominated by a “bureaucratic polity” (Riggs:1966).<sup>13</sup> One may argue over the degree to which civil society has grown in Thailand, but it is clear the country is more plural today than 30 years ago (see *The*

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<sup>12</sup> When I refer to civil society in Thailand, I refer to more than merely associational attributes. I include increased voter interest, increased strategic voting on the part of the citizen, and increased cognitive and evaluative formations by voters. Such voter attributes may or may not be the result of associational behavior.

<sup>13</sup> Arguably, Thailand never has been a “bureaucratic polity,” but the argument here is that whatever Thailand may have been in the past, it currently is more plural than at any time in that past.

*Nation*, 10/26/01) for an extended argument on this point). Pluralism has become rooted not merely in Thailand's political structure but in its voting patterns. Even if the old ways of vote-buying and local boss relations were the operative voting paradigms, their effect has diminished over the years. Thaksin cannot continue to rely upon image and old political thinking to survive.

In the 2001 election, Thaksin was the beneficiary of the bandwagon effect as voters and candidates jumped to TRT. However, bandwagons also can operate in reverse. As *The Nation* (January 22, 2001) declared, "Thai Rak Thai is really two parties of almost equal size. The first is a bunch of new faces...the second is the defector's club. The first has an average age of 38; the second, around 55...watching how these two get on should be fun." As in the case of Chuan adding the CPP to his coalition during the first government, there is risk for Thaksin in the coalition *he* has gerrymandered together.

As premier, Thaksin must defend his premiership. However, strategies of defending an administration sometimes conflict with strategies used in becoming prime minister. That is, seeking the prime ministership involves strategies of offense geared to elections and pure vote-seeking; defense requires different strategies because it occurs in a different institutional landscape. Successful leaders must be adept in *all* institutional arenas. Games of intra- and inter-party politics become more complex. The link to electoral politics becomes less certain. Thaksin must defend his government to the voters but must do so through the institutions of governing and maintaining his majority in parliament. Chuan proved adept at managing *these* institutions as to avoid dissolution. Will Thaksin? Leadership attributes used to gain the prime ministership may not be of use in trying to retain the position. He must learn, to paraphrase Harry Truman, "the baht stops here." More to the point, keeping voters in line is not the same as keeping shareholders in line. Keeping politicians in line is not the same. This is especially true when the major shareholders have been members of one's own family or house. The leader must constantly look over his or her shoulder to judge *where* one's followers are at given points in time and even more importantly the *direction* one's followers are headed. Political institutions are different from business/financial institutions. What Thaksin faces is a complex multi-dimensional vote-seeking game. The intra-party and inter-party games are related to the electoral and vote-seeking games but cannot always be synchronized to run in harmony. He must keep his own party intact while maintaining his voter support base. This is the central problem of political party organization as noted by Panebianco (1988).

There are bandwagon and synergy effects between the two. Should public support soften, politicians who jumped onto the TRT bandwagon may be inclined to jump off; should intra-party fractiousness involve factional fissions, public support may drop. The former is especially true if, in fact, Thai voters vote strategically. The latter is true if some Thai voters still take vote-choice cues from local bosses. The effect of party fusions and fissions on electoral politics is little understood. As Mair (1990) notes, “splits and mergers derive largely from elite behavior, whereas their electoral consequences will depend on responses that they generate at the popular level.” However, based upon Western European data from 1945, we can conclude that fissions and fusions have almost no effect on electoral behavior. Parties that have either added or subtracted units have, on average, *lost* 0.26 percent of the vote from the previous election. As a result, we might tentatively conclude that a Thaksin jettisoning of the Wang Nam Yen faction would have minimal effect on TRT’s subsequent electoral fortunes. At the same time, having brought NAP into the fold and negotiating with Chart Thai and Chart Pattana as strategies of fusion also will have minimal effect.

However, while the aggregate effect of fissions and fusions is minimal, if we are case specific we can find definite correlations. Thus, the case of Thailand might be one of the definitive cases, either helping or hurting electoral fortunes. Evidence indicates fissions do not occur until *after* evidence of electoral decline is present. However, the evidence also is clear that if party splits while in a spiral of electoral decline its fortunes will improve with a fissure. At the same time, if the party splits while in an electoral upswing, that upswing will stop and the party will experience a subsequent decline. The evidence is even stronger that parties do not fuse until *after* at least one of the parties has experienced a decline. The evidence is even stronger that a fusion will occur when one of the parties is in electoral decline and the other is riding high. Thus, Thaksin’s policy of bringing parties into TRT is supported by cross-national empirical evidence.

Due to the various problems faced by his government, the evidence appears to indicate a current electoral decline. The evidence regarding fissions and fusions indicates that *this* is the moment when Thaksin should jettison Wang Nam Yen and should he bring in CPP at the same time, the TRT might receive a much-needed jump in its approval by the electorate.

Then, there is the final cautionary note. Thaksin’s relationship with Thailand’s most important institution: the monarchy. The King’s birthday speech in December 2001



demonstrated irritation with Thaksin. The extent to which the King's views effect the electorate is unknown but should not be discounted.

Thaksin's leadership abilities are under examination. As Hargrove and Owens (2002) note, "politicians with agendas for change seek to create dynamic relations of talent, institutional powers, and the politics of strategic leadership in the environments they face." However, the very dynamism of these relations generates uncertainty. This paper has argued that Chuan exhibited strong leadership in forming and maintaining his governments. His leadership was less effective in creating a strong voter base. As a prime minister he was skillful, but could not link these skills with the needs of his party at election time. The test for Thaksin is whether he can link the skills that have taken him to the top of the Thai political system to those skills required to keep himself and his party there.

Thaksin appears to have lost control of the Political Operations game as it relates to intra-party politics. His control of the inter-party game remains firm because of the size of his majority. But, it is unclear what effect this is having on voters. The voters have expressed a desire to fight corruption and this issue continues to haunt him.

McCargo (2002) asks the important question as to whether the 2001 election was merely a landslide or a true realigning election. Chuan was undone by a fundamental misunderstanding of civil society. Will Thaksin be undone by a fundamental under-estimating of civil society? Can Thaksin legitimize and institutionalize a realignment of the Thai party system? His problem, compounded by the possibility that as a democracy moves through the transition period and consolidation, the relationship between leader and voter becomes increasingly complex. Can he manage this to his and the country's benefit? Chuan failed to manage that complexity; will Thaksin? The voters spoke in 2001. Will they speak again in 2005, or whenever the next election occurs?

### **Epilogue (August, 2003)**

Ultimately, for both policymakers and academics, the question boils down to the viability of Thai democracy. The visions of the most recent Thai leaders, Chuan and Thaksin neatly encapsulate the two dominant visions of democracy: procedure versus outcome. Chuan's premierships were exercises in procedural democracy: creating more efficient government,

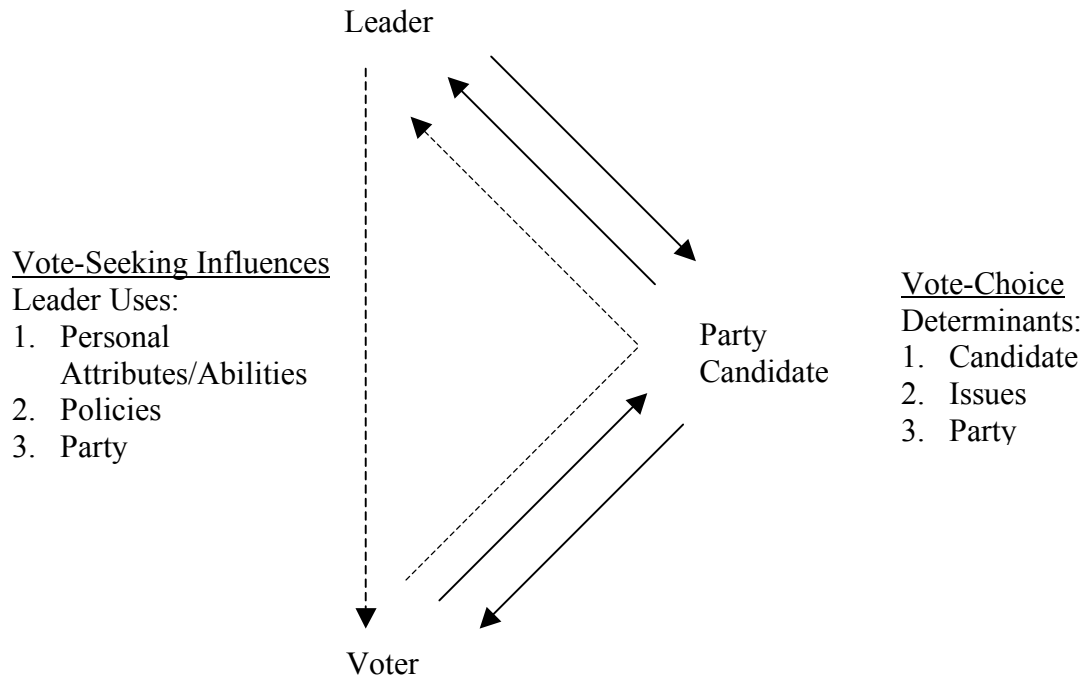
modernizing administrative structures, promulgating a new constitution. He was less concerned with outcomes; or, where he was concerned with outcomes his government tended to tilt against new mobilized voter interests in the north and northeast. Arguably, in a democracy the most important element is that losers have a chance to win. Villagers and farmers who were losers in Chuan's procedurally-oriented government found a champion in Thaksin. As a result, Chuan lost.

Thaksin is more concerned with outcomes and not particularly interested in democratic procedure. Traditionally, the Thai people have responded to strong leaders whether the reigns of Mongkut and Chulalongkorn or the authoritarian governments of Pibun and Sarit. In all four cases, outcomes not only dominated policy concerns but tended to be beneficial for the population as a whole.

There really are two questions that must be answered in assessing the viability of Thai democracy. First, can an outcomes-dominated polity remain democratic? This is both a theoretical as well as empirical question. Second, will Thaksin be content as a democratic leader? Being a democratic leader means accepting not only the reality of losing but the mere possibility of losing. Does Thaksin accept these tenets of democracy? He appears to take the parliament for granted. The parliament acts as the people's direct representatives. A viable, consolidated democratic government cannot afford to take the people for granted. Thai leaders, both authoritarian and democratic, have fallen, in part, because they took the people for granted. Chuan never learned to be a people's premier. Thaksin appears as a people's premier, but is this reality or a façade? In the short-term, this is the most interesting question facing Thai democracy.

# Appendix 1

## Leader-Voter Links



### Legend

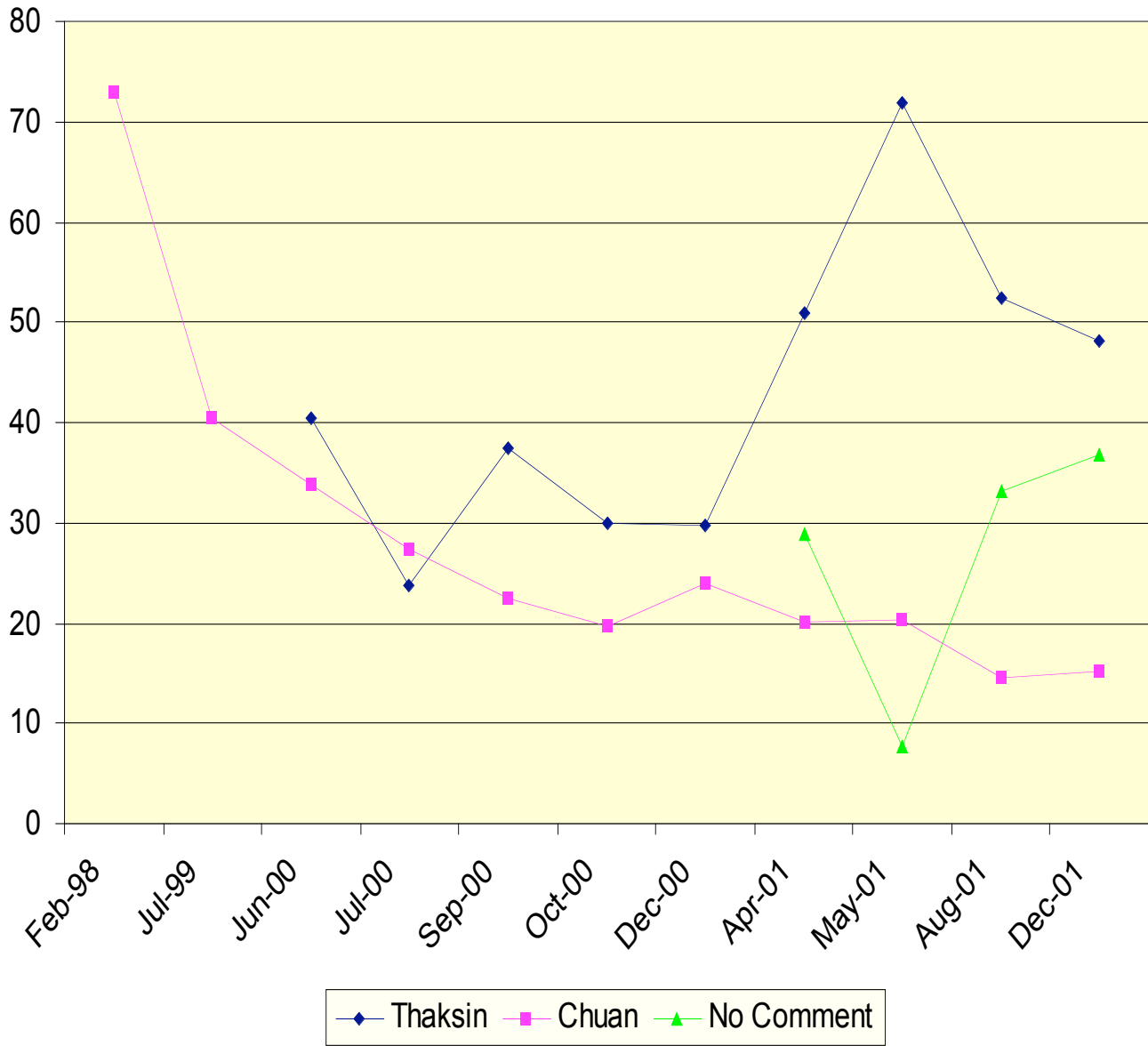
- Direct Influence
- Indirect Influence

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Leader, party and voter evaluations of each other evolve as different institutional environments generate different outcomes. The ultimate outcome is the election but even the election outcome and the evaluations upon which outcomes depend evolve in subsequent institutional environments and the outcomes of games contained in those environments.

## Appendix 2

Trend Popularity of Chuan and Thaksin February 1998 – December 2001



### Appendix 3

#### Citizen Evaluations of Policies Under Thaksin

Policy	Expected Achievement	Evaluation of Policy Achievement
Drugs	81.2 %	49.0%
One Product-One District Project	82.0	75.9%
30 Baht of Medicine	76.8%	79.0%
One Million Baht per Village	75.5%	75.7%
Corruption	67.8	23.5
Dev. Of Gov't. Enterprise	62.4	27.3
People's Bank	65.7	41.9
Debt Relief for Peasantry	59.5	50.1
TAMC	43.7	16.1

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